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ABSTRACT

The attitudes of student teachers and supervising teachers were tested according to six attributional categories: (1) pupil ability; (2) pupil effort; (3) student teacher's ability to teach; (4) student teacher's effort; (5) help from the supervising teacher; and (6) difficulty of the task. Several conclusions were reached: (1) When pupils succeed in learning, supervising teachers are more likely to give credit to the student teachers than the student teachers give themselves; (2) When pupils fail to learn, supervising teachers are less likely than student teachers to blame the pupils; and (3) The more a supervising teacher feels responsible for pupil success or failure, the less credit is given to the student teacher. Important, also, is the supervising teacher's estimate of the difficulty of the teaching assignment, a judgment which this study suggests is more closely related to what the supervising teacher believes are the abilities of the pupils than their motivational patterns. (JD)

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ATTRIBUTIONS OF SUPERVISING TEACHERS FOR THE SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF PUPILS TAUGHT BY THEIR STUDENT TEACHERS

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It is generally recognized that no person is more important in the education of a future teacher than the supervising teacher, also called the "cooperating teacher," with whom the novice undertakes student teaching. The supervising teacher has tremendous influence in many ways. For example, Seperson and Joyce (1981) found that cooperating teachers had a highly significant impact upon the teaching styles of their student teachers. The relationship therefore, between teacher and supervising teacher, is important. Such a concern is underlined by the results of a study of Southall and King (1979) who asked supervising teachers to identify the critical incidents faced by student teachers--a critical incident being defined as a situation which might "jeopardize the completion or success of the student teaching experience" (p. 34). The most common critical incident identified by these supervising teachers was, by far, the "lack of communication between cooperating teacher and the student teacher" (p. 35).

The present study was directed toward understanding one plausible basis of such poor communication: A conflict in basic beliefs about the cause of pupil success and failure. For example, as Weiner (1972) has suggested, parent-teacher

conferences are likely to deteriorate rapidly if the parent and the teacher hold conflicting views about whether the cause of a pupil's failure in schools lies with the teacher or with the pupil. Similarly, a breakdown in communication is likely to be found if student teachers believe that the pupil's successes are to be attributed to the teacher and pupil's failures to the pupil when their supervising teachers believe the opposite.

There is empirical evidence to suggest that such a conflict in causal beliefs might frequently occur. The literature shows that actors and observers usually make different attributions of the consequences of the actor's behavior. Under a variety of conditions, individuals acting in achievement settings, unlike observers, usually attribute success internally to themselves. while failure is attributed to external factors (Arkin, Gleason and Johnston, 1976; Nisbett, et al., 1973; Larson, 1977; Miller, 1976). While some writers explain this "self-serving bias" in motivational terms (e.g., Larson, 1977; Miller, 1976), others have adopted an information processing framework (Jones and Nisbett, 1971; Monson and Snyder, 1977). They point out that since actors and observers have different information available, the observed differences in attribution patterns may not be a matter of "bias." It seems clear, however, that in interpreting such findings, it is important to note the conditions of the study (Miller and Ross, 1975).

In the field of education, Beckman (1973), using a "bogus student," found that teachers took relatively greater credit for their students' success and less blame for failure than did neutral observers of the teaching session. However, in a different but also contrived setting, Ames (1979) found teachers readily accepted responsibility for student failures. With instructions to rate the importance of different causes of their pupils' successes and failures in class, Keislar (1979) found that the extent of such a "bias" among student teachers depended on the success orientation of the individual.

Attributions for teaching success and failure reflect causal beliefs, beliefs as to who or what deserves credit or blame, in other words responsibility. As such, attributions are fundamental psychological factors to be understood in any discussion of teacher accountability. The causal beliefs of supervising teachers are basic to the way they evaluate the performance of student teachers and the way they interact with them.

It was the purpose of this investigation to understand better the attributional patterns of supervising teachers, in relation to their student teachers. A secondary goal was to develop and assess the merits of an instrument to measure the attributions of supervising teachers.

The instrument

The attribution test consisted of two parts, one dealing with "pupil success in learning" and the other treating "pupil failure to learn." There was a total of 36 items, each consisting of a statement whose importance as a cause was to be rated on a six point scale.

Using an adaptation of Weiner's attributional model (1979), the causal sources, or attributional categories, were: pupil ability, pupil effort, student-teacher ability to teach, student-teacher effort, help from the supervising teacher, and difficulty of the task (the teaching assignment). Three items, arranged randomly throughout the test, were used for success attributions to assess each of the above attributions. Examples are "The student teacher tried very hard to do a good job of teaching," "I gave the student teacher the right kind of support." Each statement on the failure attribution scale was a restatement in the negative of the corresponding success statement, e.g., "I gave the student teacher very little support." A parallel test, identical except for slight differences in wording, especially in use of pronouns, was prepared for use by student teachers. These two attribution tests are presented in Appendices A and B, respectively.

Method

The two forms of the test were distributed to 165 student teachers and their supervising teachers. To preserve complete anonymity, no identifying data was obtained other than level of teaching in school. All respondents were assured that there was no interest in knowing anyone's name. Useable tests were obtained from 106 supervising teachers and 95 student teachers. Because of an occasional skipped item, the N for some analyses was lower.

Results

The first question is about the adequacy of the instrument for the student teachers and the supervising teachers separately. The reliabilities, Cronbach's alpha, of these 12 scales, for supervising teachers, ranged from .75 to .92. But because of the likelihood of a response set to rate statements generally high or low, the 36 raw scores for each person were transformed to standardized scores. The reliability of these individualized standardized ratings ranged from .58 to .85, somewhat lower but still satisfactory for measures based on only three items. Very similar ranges were obtained for the student teachers. The reliabilities of all these scales, both raw and standardized scores, are presented in Tables 1 and 2, which also show all means and standard deviations for both groups.

Unlike most attribution tests, where the word ability or effort is used to denote the source, the present instrument used three statements for each of such terms. To find out whether the three statements "hang together," as expected, a factor analysis was undertaken for each group separately. For the supervising teachers, all 36 items, except two, loaded with the other two items of the scale for which they were designed. But even these two exceptions conformed, when the second highest loading was taken into account. The factor analysis called for exactly twelve factors. Ten scales loaded on completely separate factors. Two scales for failure, teacher ability and teacher effort, loaded together on one factor indicating that these scales were not highly distinct for the supervising teachers. An almost identical set of findings was obtained from the factor analysis of the student teachers. These results, with one or two exceptions, confirm the fact that the three different statements were perceived by respondents as being fairly unified measures, distinct from the other scales.

The pattern of attributions given by the student teachers under these general instructional conditions, indeed reveal a bias, self-serving or otherwise. As shown in Figure 1, the student teachers attributed to themselves, both for ability and effort, greater importance for pupil success than they attributed to the pupils, but they attributed to the pupils' ability and effort relatively more importance for failure. This interaction

was highly significant ($F = 37.4$, $p<.01$). In other words, they took relatively more credit for success and less blame for failure, an interaction more pronounced for secondary than for elementary teachers ($F = 9.4$, $p<.01$).

The critical finding, however, lies in the data for supervising teachers also presented in Figure 1. Here it may be noted that supervising teachers also display the same bias: They give the student teachers relatively more credit for pupil success and less blame for pupil failure. This interaction was also quite significant ($F = 20.22$, $p<.01$). The differences between elementary and secondary supervising teachers were not significant.

The supervising teachers did not differ in their "bias" from the student teachers; the triple interaction (2 teacher roles x 2 outcome conditions x 2 causes) was not significant. Nevertheless, supervising teachers did give relatively more credit to the student teachers (versus the pupils) than did the student teachers themselves ($F = 7.24$, $p<.01$). At the same time, the supervising teachers blamed the pupils relatively less than did the student teachers ($F = 5.75$, $p<.01$).

In an effort to throw more light on the nature of this apparent "identification" with the student teacher, the scales were rescored so as to provide measures of the difference between attributions to the student teacher and attributions

to the pupils separately for success and failure. These "difference" scores, consisting of 12 items each, constituted for student teachers essentially one measure of internality. The reliabilities were .62 and .65 for success and failure respectively. We might note, parenthetically, that two such "internality" scales have been specifically developed for teachers (Guskey, 1980; Rose and Medway, 1980).

For the supervising teachers, these difference scores were fairly reliable, .67 for success and .77 for failure. Using the difference scales, we reach the same conclusions as before: The supervising teachers gave more credit to the student teachers (relative to the pupils) than the student teachers gave themselves, and relatively less blame to the pupils. But this relationship depended on how the supervising teacher felt about his or her own assistance, assessed by a 3 item scale. If supervising teachers felt their own help to the student teacher was important for pupil success, they significantly blamed the student teacher relatively more for failure ($r = .28$, $p < .01$). There was also an unreliable tendency to give relatively less credit to the student teacher ($r = -.10$). Conversely, the more the supervising teacher felt that pupils failed because of his or her lack of help, the less relative credit was given to the student teacher for success ($r = -.22$, $p < .01$), more relative blame for failure ($r = .30$, $p < .01$).

These attributions for failure illustrate an augmenting principle (Kelley, 1971): The more a supervising teacher feels personally responsible for pupil failure, the more the student teacher is blamed, and the less credit given. On the other hand, a discounting principle may be operating for success: The more a supervising teacher feels responsible for pupil success, the less credit and more blame is given to the student teacher.

It is of interest to note that the supervising teachers had strong views about what constitutes an easy or difficult teaching assignment. Attributions to the easiness of the teaching task correlated much higher with attributions to pupil ability ($r = .62$) than with pupil effort ($r = .38$). Similarly the correlation of attributions to task difficulty with attributions to lack of pupil ability ($r = .65$) was much higher than to lack of pupil effort ($r = .31$). We may conclude that when supervising teachers judge how difficult a teaching assignment is, they give much more weight to the ability of the pupils than to how much attention or effort such pupils are known to display. Student teachers, incidentally, took the same position. All these correlation differences were significant ($p < .01$).

A limitation of this study needs to be mentioned. Although the student teachers and the supervising teachers were drawn from the same program, the proportion of returns left something

to be desired. We do not know how many of each of the two groups were addressing the same classrooms in their replies. A replication study is called for in which student teachers' responses are paired in some way with those of their supervising teachers even though both individuals remain unidentified. This design would increase both the precision and information value of the study. Such a replication study is currently underway.

Conclusion

The way that supervising teachers think about the causes of pupil success and failure in the classroom would appear to be important for the student teacher who is teaching those pupils. This paper suggests, contrary to what might be expected on the basis of other research in social psychology, that when pupils succeed in learning, supervising teachers are more likely to give credit to the student teachers than these beginners are themselves. On the other hand, when pupils fail to learn, supervising teachers are less likely to blame the pupils. However, these tendencies are related to how much the supervising teacher believes that his or her help, or lack of it, was an important reason for the pupil outcomes. Important, also, is likely to be the supervising teachers' estimate of the difficulty of the teaching assignment, a judgment which this study has suggested is more closely related to what the supervising teacher believes are the abilities of the pupils than their motivational

patterns. The key role played by supervising teachers in teacher education justifies further attempts to understand their causal beliefs which underlie their evaluation of student teachers.

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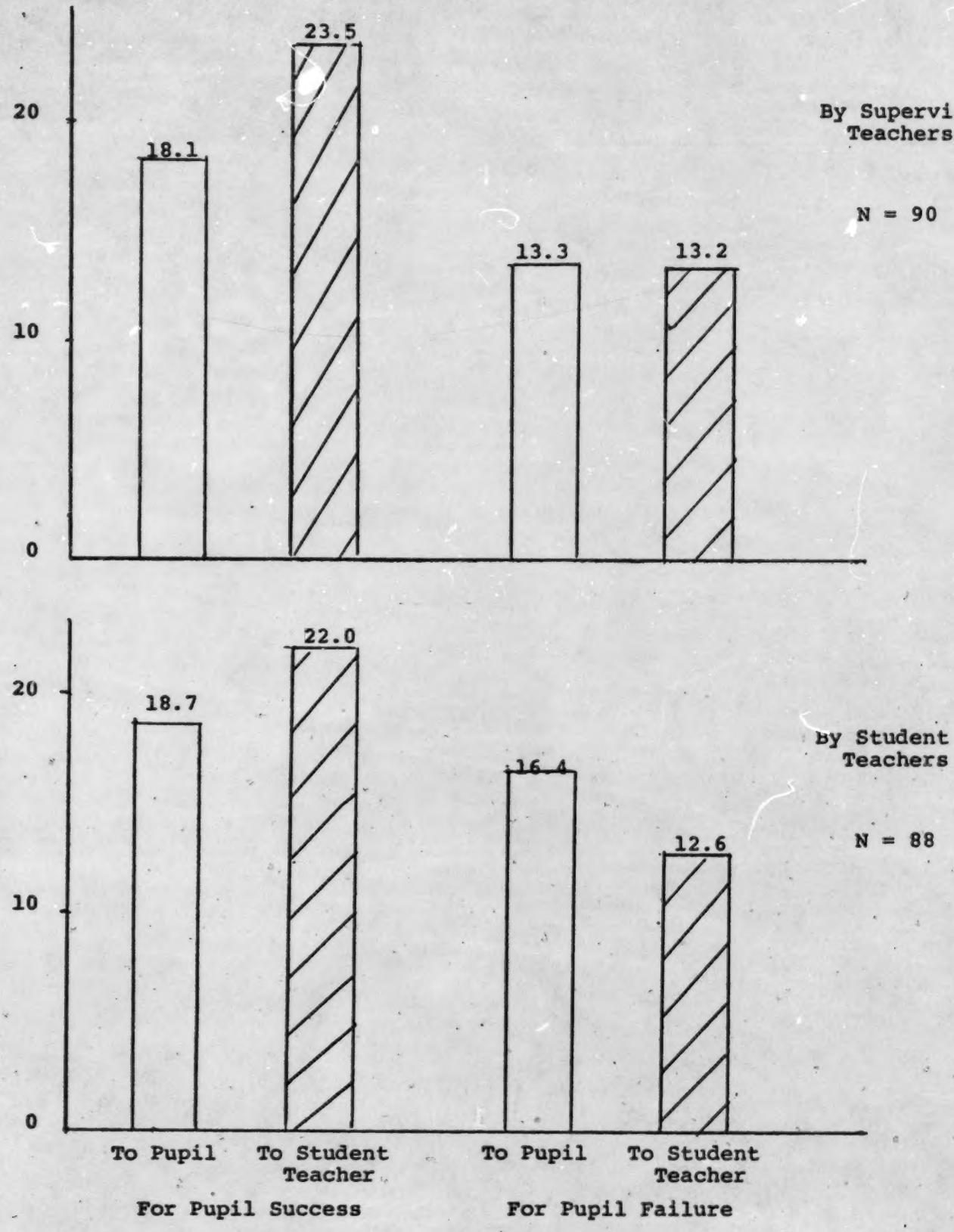

Figure 1. Attributions for pupil success and failure by supervising teachers and student teachers.

Table 1

Means, S.D.s, and Reliabilities for Supervising Teachers' Attributions

Number of Items	Attributions	Mean		S.D.		Reliability	
A.	Success to						
6	Pupil	18.0	(1.33)	5.5	(2.7)	.84	(.66)
3	ability	8.1	(.04)	3.2	(1.8)	.79	(.65)
3	effort	9.9	(1.29)	2.9	(1.5)	.75	(.58)
6	Teacher (ST)	23.5	(5.32)	4.2	(2.2)	.83	(.68)
3	ability	11.1	(2.18)	2.7	(1.6)	.84	(.76)
3	effort	12.4	(3.14)	2.1	(1.2)	.79	(.67)
3	Super. Teacher	9.9	(1.23)	3.2	(1.9)	.85	(.79)
3	Task Ease	5.5	(-1.70)	3.8	(2.2)	.85	(.78)
B.	Failure to						
6	Pupil (FP)	13.3	(-1.36)	6.5	(3.2)	.83	(.68)
3	ability	5.6	(-1.44)	3.6	(2.0)	.75	(.60)
3	effort	7.8	(.08)	3.9	(2.1)	.87	(.80)
6	Teacher (FT)	13.2	(-2.11)	8.9	(4.5)	.92	(.84)
3	ability	5.2	(-2.09)	4.6	(2.3)	.90	(.75)
3	effort	8.0	(- .02)	4.9	(2.8)	.88	(.83)
3	Super. Teacher	5.1	(-2.13)	4.5	(2.4)	.91	(.85)
3	Task Difficulty	6.9	(- .59)	3.9	(2.3)	.84	(.76)

Note: Figures in parentheses refer to results from standardized scores

Table 2

Means, S.D.s, and Reliabilities for Student Teachers' Attributions

Number of Items	Attributions	Mean		S.D.		Reliability	
A.	Success to						
6	Pupil (SP)	18.7	(2.08)	5.5	(2.8)	.83	(.65)
3	ability	8.6	(.43)	3.1	(1.8)	.76	(.56)
3	effort	10.1	(1.65)	3.2	(1.8)	.82	(.70)
6	Teacher (ST)	22.0	(4.35)	4.4	(2.7)	.81	(.71)
3	ability	10.6	(1.88)	2.7	(1.8)	.80	(.75)
3	effort	11.4	(2.47)	2.5	(1.5)	.79	(.66)
3	Super. Teacher	9.1	(.50)	4.0	(2.4)	.86	(.77)
3	Task Ease	5.9	(-1.88)	3.2	(1.8)	.75	(.48)
B.	Failure to						
6	Pupil (FP)	16.4	(.21)	6.6	(3.5)	.85	(.75)
3	ability	6.7	(- .83)	3.9	(2.1)	.83	(.65)
3	effort	9.6	(1.04)	3.6	(2.1)	.85	(.78)
6	Teacher (FT)	12.6	(-2.47)	7.4	(3.3)	.88	(.67)
3	ability	4.9	(-2.26)	3.9	(1.7)	.88	(.55)
3	effort	7.7	(- .21)	4.3	(2.4)	.82	(.68)
3	Super. Teacher	5.5	(-1.81)	4.5	(2.5)	.89	(.85)
3	Task Difficulty	6.9	(- .98)	3.6	(2.1)	.74	(.61)

Note: Figures in parentheses refer to results from standardized scores

Appendix A

ATTRIBUTION QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SUPERVISING TEACHERS

Part I. Analysis of Pupil Success in Learning

Directions. During the term, when the student teacher was in charge, there were occasions when pupils in the class were successful in learning. We'd like to ask, "Why did they learn so well on these different occasions?" There are probably a number of reasons depending on the particular pupils and the particular occasion. But try to think about all the events, when the student teacher was in charge, which represented successful learning. The more often a reason applies, the more important it is in explaining pupil success in learning.

For each of the statements below, indicate the importance of each statement by circling a number using the code in the box to the right.

5 = An extremely important reason
4 = A very important reason
3 = A fairly important reason
2 = A somewhat important reason
1 = A slightly important reason
0 = Of no importance at all

When the student teacher was in charge Reasons for Pupil Success in Learning	Importance of this Reason for Pupil Success in Learning					
7. The pupils were very capable learners.	5	4	3	2	1	0
8. The student teacher spent a lot of time preparing for this lesson.	5	4	3	2	1	0
9. The student teacher has a lot of ability for teaching this subject.	5	4	3	2	1	0
10. I really helped the student teacher.	5	4	3	2	1	0
11. Teaching this subject to these pupils was a very easy assignment.	5	4	3	2	1	0
12. The pupils worked very hard.	5	4	3	2	1	0
13. The student teacher has a real talent for teaching in this field.	5	4	3	2	1	0
14. The student teacher tried very hard to do a good job of teaching.	5	4	3	2	1	0
15. Most teachers would have had an easy time with this teaching task.	5	4	3	2	1	0
16. I gave the student teacher the right kind of support.	5	4	3	2	1	0
17. The pupils knew how to learn this subject well.	5	4	3	2	1	0
18. The pupils really tried to do their best.	5	4	3	2	1	0
19. The student teacher paid very careful attention to what he or she was doing.	5	4	3	2	1	0
20. The student teacher was good at getting this subject across.	5	4	3	2	1	0
21. The pupils had a lot of aptitude for this subject.	5	4	3	2	1	0
22. Any teacher would have found it easy to teach these pupils.	5	4	3	2	1	0
23. I tried hard to assist the student teacher.	5	4	3	2	1	0
24. The pupils paid very careful attention that day.	5	4	3	2	1	0

Part II. Analysis of Pupil Failure to Learn

Directions. During the term, when the student teacher was in charge, there were occasions when pupils in the class were not successful in learning. We'd like to ask, "Why did they fail on these occasions?" There are probably a number of reasons depending on the particular pupils and the particular occasion. But try to think about all the events, when the student teacher was in charge, when represented pupil failure to learn. The more often a reason applies, the more important it is in explaining pupil failure to learn.

For each of the statements below, indicate the importance of each statement by circling a number using the code in the box.

5 = An extremely important reason
4 = A very important reason
3 = A fairly important reason
2 = A somewhat important reason
1 = A slightly important reason
0 = Of no importance at all

When the student teacher was in charge Reasons for Pupil Failure to Learn	Importance of this reason for pupil failure to learn					
25. The pupils were fairly slow learners.	5	4	3	2	1	0
26. The student teacher did not prepare well enough for the session.	5	4	3	2	1	0
27. The student teacher really doesn't have much ability to teach this subject.	5	4	3	2	1	0
28. I didn't really help the student teacher.	5	4	3	2	1	0
29. Teaching this subject to this class was a most difficult assignment.	5	4	3	2	1	0
30. The pupils didn't work very hard on that occasion.	5	4	3	2	1	0
31. The student teacher is just unable to teach this field well.	5	4	3	2	1	0
32. The student teacher didn't try very hard to do a good job of teaching.	5	4	3	2	1	0
33. Most teachers would have had a very tough time with this teaching task.	5	4	3	2	1	0
34. I gave the student teacher very little support.	5	4	3	2	1	0
35. The pupils didn't know how to learn this subject.	5	4	3	2	1	0
36. The pupils didn't try to learn that day.	5	4	3	2	1	0
37. The student teacher didn't pay enough attention to what she or he was doing.	5	4	3	2	1	0
38. The student teacher is not good enough at getting this subject across.	5	4	3	2	1	0
39. The pupils had little aptitude for the topic.	5	4	3	2	1	0
40. Any teacher would have found it very hard to teach these students,	5	4	3	2	1	0
41. I didn't try hard enough to assist the student teacher.	5	4	3	2	1	0
42. The pupils didn't pay attention that day.	5	4	3	2	1	0

Appendix B

ATTRIBUTION QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENT TEACHERS

Part IV: Analysis of Student Success in Learning

Directions. Sometimes students in your class are quite successful in learning. Why did they learn so well on these different occasions? There are probably a number of reasons depending on the particular student and day. But try to think about all the events during the past term and how often each reason was important. The more often the reason applies, the more important it is.

For each of the statements below, indicate the importance of each statement by circling a number using the code in the box.

5 = An extremely important reason
4 = A very important reason
3 = A fairly important reason
2 = A somewhat important reason
1 = A slightly important reason
0 = Of no importance at all

Reasons for Student Success in Learning	Importance of this reason for student success in learning					
49. The students were very capable learners.	5	4	3	2	1	0
50. I spent a lot of time preparing for this lesson.	5	4	3	2	1	0
51. I have a lot of ability for teaching this subject.	5	4	3	2	1	0
52. My supervising teacher really helped me.	5	4	3	2	1	0
53. Teaching this subject to these students was a very easy assignment.	5	4	3	2	1	0
54. The students worked very hard.	5	4	3	2	1	0
55. I have a real talent for teaching in this field.	5	4	3	2	1	0
56. I tried very hard to do a good job of teaching.	5	4	3	2	1	0
57. Most teachers would have had an easy time with this teaching task.	5	4	3	2	1	0
58. My supervising teacher gave me the right kind of support.	5	4	3	2	1	0
59. The students knew how to learn this subject well.	5	4	3	2	1	0
60. The students really tried to do their best.	5	4	3	2	1	0
61. I paid very careful attention to what I was doing.	5	4	3	2	1	0
62. I'm good at getting this subject across.	5	4	3	2	1	0
63. The students had a lot of aptitude for this subject.	5	4	3	2	1	0
64. Any teacher would have found it easy to teach these students.	5	4	3	2	1	0
65. My supervising teacher was available when I needed help.	5	4	3	2	1	0
66. The students paid very careful attention that day.	5	4	3	2	1	0

Part V: Analysis of Student Failure to Learn

Directions. You may have found during the past tthat sometimes students were not successful in learning. Why did they fail on these occasions? There are probably a number of reasons depending on the particular student and day. The more often the reason applies, the more important it is.

For each of the statements below, indicate the importance of each statement by circling a number using the code in the box.

5 = An extremely important reason
4 = A very important reason
3 = A fairly important reason
2 = A somewhat important reason
1 = A slightly important reason
0 = Of no importance at all

Reasons for Student Failure to Learn	Importance of this reason for student failure to learn					
67. The students were fairly slow learners.	5	4	3	2	1	0
68. I did not prepare well enough for the session.	5	4	3	2	1	0
69. I really don't have much ability to teach this subject.	5	4	3	2	1	0
70. My supervising teacher didn't really help me.	5	4	3	2	1	0
71. Teaching this subject to this class was a most difficult assignment.	5	4	3	2	1	0
72. The students didn't work very hard on that occasion.	5	4	3	2	1	0
73. I am just unable to teach this field well.	5	4	3	2	1	0
74. I didn't try very hard to do a good job of teaching.	5	4	3	2	1	0
75. Most teachers would have had a very tough time with this teaching task.	5	4	3	2	1	0
76. My supervising teacher gave me very little support.	5	4	3	2	1	0
77. The students didn't know how to learn this subject.	5	4	3	2	1	0
78. The students didn't try to learn that day.	5	4	3	2	1	0
79. I didn't pay enough attention to what I was doing.	5	4	3	2	1	0
80. I am not good in getting this subject across.	5	4	3	2	1	0
81. The students had little aptitude for the topic.	5	4	3	2	1	0
82. Any teacher would have found it very hard to teach these students.	5	4	3	2	1	0
83. My supervising teacher wasn't available when I needed help.	5	4	3	2	1	0
84. The students didn't pay attention that day.	5	4	3	2	1	0